

OAKTON ORAL HISTORY

by

Bernard A. Speer

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EVANS: Today is Wednesday, June 18th, 1980. This is an interview on the history of Oakton with Mr. Bernard Speer. (Mrs. Speer was also present in an advisory capacity at her husband's request and proved most helpful), at his residence, 6111 Foxhill Street, Springfield, Virginia. The interviewer is D'Anne Evans. To get started, Mr. Speer, I wanted to ask you if you know roughly when your family first came to Fairfax County.

SPEER: No, I really don't know what year this part of the family, my grandfather moved there, early 1900 I would say, but I'm not certain of the date.

EVANS: On the old map, you know the post office reproduction? - I find residences for your family in 1879. (Looking at family Bible data) This Cornelius Horton Speer was your grandfather? He was born in Fairfax County in 1845. So you see, you have been here since before the Civil War: that's what Mayo thought, that your family had in fact lived in Fairfax County, because many people came to Oakton after the Civil War. Other people came from the north before the Civil War, and then there were people who lived in Oakton for a long, long period before that, but a great many left in the 1830's and 1840's.

SPEER: This date would indicate that at least from 1845 - he was born here.

MRS. S: His family might have been here longer.

SPEER: Prior to that I have no recollection or information.

EVANS: Does that say who his father was?

SPEER: No, this is his wife's name - Sarah A. No, I'm incorrect on that. That was the first child. No, I correct that. Sarah A. was his wife's name, and she was born the 30th of May, 1854 in Columbia County, New York.

EVANS: One reason I was asking whether you knew his father's name, was because I'm now ~~looking~~ in deed books. You see those old deed books would tell me where the Speers first bought, but I need to know the full name, because even then

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EVANS: there were a lot of people whose names began in "s" involved in land dealings. So at least we know that your family has been in Oakton, in that area since before the Civil War, because your grandfather was born there.

SPEER: (Mrs. Speer has brought in copies of an invitation printed in gold and he is reading from them) William P. Speer - that would be their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

EVANS: William P.. Speers- 1835.

SPEER: To 1885. That was their fiftieth. He was married in 1835.

EVANS: That gives me a lead, you see. I will look up William P. Speer and see if I can find anything. Since you have here that Cornelius' wife was born in New York, it sounds possible that they were among the many families from upstate New York who came to Oakton.

SPEER: I understand that my family originally came from New York.

MRS. S: That's what your mother said.

EVANS: There were a lot of people, as you may or may not know, who came down at that time and a number settled around Oakton, I believe.

SPEER: I was also told that they were of German descent.

MRS. S: Here's something else. Mr. and Mrs. William P. Speer, I can't read that - and here's the picture. (Mrs. Speer had brought a small tintype and an explanation we did not take time to examine carefully and neglected to go back to later, but might have been picture of the William P. Speers.)

EVANS: (tape was switched off and on once or twice in discussion of which relative might have more information, but more decided recommendation comes later.) Now you know on the golden wedding anniversary it says "Flint Hill." That was only about five years after they'd been obliged to change the name to Oakton, but the people in Flint Hill maybe were still holding out for Flint Hill. Did they actually live right in the village or were they out on a farm? Do you know?

SPEER: The original Speer home was on Jermantown Road, which is now known as Jermantown Road. They later moved to a farm of approximately sixty acres at the intersection of Route 123 and Jermantown Road. The house still stands. It's a frame house. It's been sold a number of times. I don't know who's living there at the present time. The property is now part of the ITT complex. You know that new big building there in Oakton? It's a tremendous facility. That was part of the property that was the original Speer tract. Other parts of it have been covered with condominiums, apartments, townhouses, etc.

MRS. S: Isn't the house right next to those townhouses?

SPEER: Yes. It's right on the main road. It's an old frame house with some large trees around it. Lawrence Leigh at one time owned the property. He's an attorney, I believe, in Fairfax.

EVANS: Now, is that where you lived when you were a boy in Oakton?

SPEER: No. My father built a house on the corner of his family farm, and we lived there until 1932. That's when I moved from Oakton to Falls Church.

EVANS: You say you were seventeen at that time?

SPEER: My home was right on the corner of the Speer property which was located on Blake Lane, yes.

EVANS: Blake Lane and 123?

SPEER: Blake Lane is a connecting road from 123 to 29. It's about a quarter of a mile from 123. The house is still there.

EVANS: When you were seventeen, you must have gone to highschool in Oakton.

SPEER: I attended highschool at the old Oakton Highschool, in 1932.

EVANS: That was about the last class?

SPEER: I think there was one class after that, and then the school burned down.

EVANS: Mayo said that they also opened Fairfax City High just after that.

SPEER: That's right. I think there was one class after mine, and then they made an intermediate school there, after they rebuilt.

EVANS: He also said that there was a certain feeling. I asked him, because I have been familiar with the fact there were not many highschools in Fairfax County at that period. I said I was surprised that the highschool was in Oakton rather than Vienna or Fairfax. He said that this was perhaps the result of some disagreement between Fairfax and Vienna, both of which wanted the highschool. They compromised, and it was midway, there in Oakton. That there was a certain feeling between the Vienna and the Fairfax people attending the highschool.. Do you remember any of that?

SPEER: I don't recall anything of that nature. The only school that I remember in the area was Oakton Highschool.

MRS. S: Wasn't there Fairfax Highschool? There was just Jefferson and Oakton?

SPEER: I think I'm correct in this. I don't know whether it's significant. The only highschools in Fairfax County at that time were McLean, Oakton, Clifton (believe it or not), Lee-Jackson down on 236, Falls Church and Herndon.

MRS. S: It was Jefferson Highschool in Falls Church.

EVANS: The reason I know about Lee-Jackson is the people from the area where I live - Wakefield - went to Lee-Jackson, and they had to drive themselves. You were fortunate to live in Oakton, because people used to come and board, I understand, in Oakton to go to highschool.

SPEER: I don't recall any particular students doing that. If it was so, I wasn't aware of it. After all we only had approximately one hundred in the total highschool. There were, I believe, twenty in the graduating class.

EVANS: Did you have many of the kinds of activities that are associated with highschools today?

SPEER: We had sports, baseball and basketball. No football.

EVANS: Was there a village or an Oakton baseball team, since you brought it up?
In the early 1900's there was.

SPEER: There were teams in Vienna. I don't recall any in Oakton. Vienna had some teams, both whites and blacks. I recall going to some games. Blacks, if you want to use the term, played baseball in Vienna on Sunday afternoons, and it was a real entertainment.

MRS. S: Aren't you going to tell about the only team in Fairfax County that ever won a championship in basketball?

EVANS: Oh, really? Oakton High?

MRS. S: Right.

SPEER: Yes, I'm not certain whether it was '31 or '32, but the Oakton Highschool basketball team won the state championship in their class.

EVANS: And you were on it?

SPEER: I happen to have been a member of the team.

MRS. S: You've got the article upstairs.

SPEER: I was surprised. I've got this article in the "Globe" - this was about two years ago. It said this was the only state championship in basketball that the County had ever won. My neighbor saw it. She (Mrs. S.) may find it. I haven't had my name in print too often.

EVANS: Can you tell me, if you don't mind, what it was like growing up in Oakton. You would have been born about 1912?

SPEER: 1917. I graduated from highschool at age 16. I completed highschool. We lived there one year and then moved to Falls Church in 1933. As far as social activity, the school had dances from time to time, which were supervised and chaperoned for the most part. Most residents were church people and they had social functions from time to time.

EVANS: Would you say that a lot of social life centered around the church in those days?

- SPEER: In my particular case yes. My family were very good church people. I recall having an eleven-year pin for not having missed Sunday School for eleven years.
- EVANS: Did you go to the Methodist Church?
- SPEER: Methodist Church, right there on Route 123. The old church is still standing. It's been enlarged, of course.
- EVANS: I remember Mrs. Wynkoop saying that she knew your family. Do you remember Mrs. Wynkoop? She moved away before your.....
- SPEER: No, I don't recall that name. Of course, in those days you had no television. Some people had radios and listened to "Amos 'n' Andy."
- EVANS: In talking about radios, Mr. Speer, do you remember finding flints to use in radio sets? As the early name for Oakton was Flint Hill, I have heard Mr. Sam Pearson from McLean speak of using the flints he found on his farm for the crystals for crystal radio sets. He said that those so-called flints were really quartz that you could use in those early radios when you built your own.
- SPEER: That could be. I wasn't aware of it. I never heard that. We had radios, but not television at that time.
- EVANS: On, no. I remember those days. I wonder if you go back to your very early memories as a very small boy. Did you help out a lot on the farm?
- SPEER: Yes, my summer activity involved thinning corn on Grandpa's farm, pitching hay, picking cherries. He had a large apple orchard. He made cider. He was well known in the County for making cider on a commercial scale.
- EVANS: Well, then your grandfather was a very active farmer. Your father wasn't a farmer, but your grandfather was?
- SPEER: My dad was a carpenter and builder. He worked on the farm until he was of age, I would say, and then he went out on his own and became a carpenter and builder.

EVANS: You must have had lots of relatives all around Oakton then.

SPEER: The family was thirteen children as this (tapping Bible) would indicate, the family Bible. Most of them stayed in the area or within the County environment. We had George Speer, one of the other sons, my uncle. He lived directly across the street from the family farm. It's still owned by his family, one daughter. Craigs live in the immediate area, Craig movers and haulers. That was one of the daughters who married a Craig. The family still runs the business, the sons.

EVANS: Would you say you were very close in that you were together a lot? Did you do a lot of things together as a family or did everybody pretty much go his or her own way?

SPEER: At least once a year there was a family reunion. There would be approximately 100 people there, which would include the family and their children.

EVANS: So you had 100 people. That would have been a lot of fun I would think for the children.

SPEER: I can't recall too many things that happened, other than they always had a lot of food. The kids played around the area. Other than that, nothing much. It was just a family reunion. We tried to get together at least once a year with the children and the grandchildren.

EVANS: You sort of take it for granted, which suggests to me that in those days most families did that.

SPEER: I think that was pretty general throughout that period of time, that they'd have a family reunion from time to time. We still pursue that in our own family. We have a lot of get-togethers, several times a year. Fortunately we're not too far apart, fifty or sixty miles. We still enjoy our family, too, which probably was a carryover from that generation. I don't remember my grandmother. She died in 1908, so I don't remember her.

- SPEER: I remember my grandfather very well. He died in 1933. He had a long beard. My dad really nursed him until his death. Since we lived close by, my dad really took care of him in his later years, and my mother was helpful, too.
- EVANS: When you were growing up, what particular families lived close to that central area? Where you say your family homes were is sort of considered the central part of Oakton, the village.
- SPEER: Right in the main part, Blakes, Harry Blake, was one of the residents there and Adams.
- EVANS: What about Mr. W.R. Gray and his florist?
- SPEER: Mr. Gray? Yes, I remember him.
- EVANS: What do you remember especially about the Grays and the florist. That was perhaps, next to farming, the most successful business in Oakton, wouldn't you say?
- SPEER: He had a nursery, and, I guess, did a very nice business. He seemed to have a lot of activity there. Also there was a store there called Havener's Store, which was right next to Gray's nursery. Little grocery store. And the Lontells'. Now that was an old little grocery store on the railroad tracks. They were there for a number of years, so they would be one of the older residents.
- EVANS: How would you spell that - Lontels?
- SPEER: I don't remember.
- MRS. S: We know his name was Fritz Lontell.
- SPEER: Well, he's now dead. That was the son of the family.
- EVANS: I was asking Mayo, too - Mr. Gray subdivided some of his land into lots about the time that this little electric interurban came through about 1903. I asked Mayo if the people had built houses on the lots next to the station of the railroad that went through Mr. Gray's land. Mayo said he did believe he remembered houses right around that little station. Do

EVANS: you remember anything like that?

SPEER: There were houses around the station. Now when they were built, that really might have been before my time.

EVANS: It would have been before your time that they were built.

SPEER: There were houses around the station as long as I can remember.

EVANS: I think that was the first subdivision, I really do. I wonder if your father could have helped build any of them.

SPEER: No, I don't think so. He built his own house where he lived there. Later he did assist in building some other homes in the area; but around 1928 he moved out of the area and started building in Falls Church area. Any specific house he built in Oakton I don't really know.

MRS. S: Didn't he build the Adams house?

SPEER: Yes, that's true. He built the Adams house which is on Blake Lane, and he also built the parsonage for the church, which is now occupied by Whitesell. No, I stand corrected, the house next to it is owned by the Whitesell. The parsonage was built by my dad, and I helped him build it. One thing I recall, probably when I was around twelve years old, thirteen at the most. I was driving a tractor, and he was the man behind grading the parsonage. That's one memory I have at that time.

EVANS: That was probably really something for a twelve year old, too.

SPEER: In those days you didn't have to have a permit to drive a car. I had my own automobile at age eleven and drove all over Fairfax County.

EVANS: At the age of eleven?!

SPEER: The only requirement then was that you carry a registration card to show ownership of the car. You could drive at any age - no permits required.

EVANS: I suppose if no permits, no tests or anything?

MRS. S: They didn't have that many roads to drive on.

SPEER: There were quite a few roads in that area. You had Hunter Mill Road which

SPEER: went back to Waples Mill and Difficult Run where we all went swimming.

EVANS: Oh, you swam in Difficult Run? That was the swimming hole?

SPEER: That was the swimming hole with all the snakes and whatever.

EVANS: What kind of snakes?

SPEER: Water moccasins would swim around with you. They didn't bother you as long as they were in the water. That's what I was told. I never had one bother me, so I can't really say.

EVANS: Well, exactly where, if you were locating your swimming hole on Difficult Run today, where would it be?

SPEER: Waples Mill Road. A family of Waples lived back there. They probably still do. That would be between Oakton and Fairfax really on Difficult Run.

EVANS: Which Waples? There are many Waples.

SPEER: Well, of course, the original Waple family had a number of children and they have also stayed in the area. I don't remember the first name, but there was a large family of Waples. Some went to school with me, being my same age group.

EVANS: I was just thinking it would be fun to take a picture of where the popular swimming hole for a lot of the Oakton school young people was in those days. It's probably still there.

SPEER: Well, Difficult Run is still there. A lot has been built up around it, so that swimming hole may not be in existence.

EVANS: Was it a wide part of the creek?

SPEER: No, it was just out in the field. There was one area where it was six or eight feet deep, so it was what we called the swimming hole. Many of the kids in the community went to Waples to go swimming. I doubt very much if I could take you to it right now. I haven't been there since 1932.

EVANS: Dr. Latch was the minister of the Methodist Church in Oakton?

SPEER: Yes, that was his first charge.

SPEER: I recall my mother and dad entertaining him when he first arrived. Later she introduced him to a young lady in the neighborhood by.....

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SPEER:became pastor at the Metropolitan Methodist Church of Washington and was also chaplain of the House of Representatives when they were here.

EVANS: Did they live in Oakton I wonder?

SPEER: That was his first charge, and then they moved various places. He's still living. He's retired. When my father died some years ago, we had him for our service. Just last year he came out of retirement to have the service for my mother who was 91.

EVANS: Then the Methodist Church would know where he is.

SPEER: He's in this area, in Bethesda, Maryland.

EVANS: I'm glad you mentioned that. I'll see if I can't get him.

MRS. S: He is interesting. You should go see him.

EVANS: Getting back to Hunter Mill Road, can you tell me something of what that was like. I remember Mrs. Rice writing to say they used to have special benefits to get gravel to put on Hunter Mill Road. That must have been one of the first improved roads when they started improving roads.

SPEER: I know the Rice family, C.T. Rice. Incidentally she's still living.

EVANS: That's right. I wrote her.

SPEER: The Smiths lived on Hunter Mill Road, who were also related to my mother's side of the family.

EVANS: Was this a descendent of Squire Smith who had the store?

SPEER: I'm not sure about the "Squire", but the Smiths were an old family in the area. Mrs. Smith was a sister of my grandfather on my mother's side, whose name was Jerman. So the Speers, my ^(mother's) side of the family, have a lot of relatives in the Oakton area also: the Thompsons, the Smiths, the Kenyons. They were all related to me on my mother's side, not the Speer side.

EVANS: Was this the Jermantown area where they lived? Or were they Oakton, too?

SPEER: Where they lived was west of Fairfax. That's where the name Jermantown Road came into existence. That went across the County and connected with Route 29, which is the road to Warrenton. That's where Jermantown Road got its name, from the Jerman family.

MRS. S: Your mother's father had a realty office in Fairfax.

SPEER: She's working on the Speer side.

MRS. S: Just the Speer side?

EVANS: Primarily, although I reading that Mr. John Jerman was bringing clients out to Oakton and selling them farms.

SPEER: That was my grandfather on my mother's side.

EVANS: He was very well known I gather in the County as a realtor. I've seen his ads in the old Fairfax Herald. Very influential.

SPEER: My mother worked for him in her early days as a young girl.

MRS. S: That was her only job.

EVANS: Well, she was an early woman realtor, because not many women were in real estate in those days I'll bet.

MRS. S: She didn't sell.

SPEER: She was just an office girl.

MRS. S: It's a shame. She died last year. She remembered everything. What a memory at 90 years old! Unreal. She could have remembered all of this.

SPEER: .She probably could have given you dates and time of day.

EVANS: I'm trying to get on every level, in other words, when you left, this period you're speaking of, Oakton was still a farming community, wouldn't you say? Or basically it was more or less of a little village?

SPEER: Yes, you would certainly call it no more than a village. There was a post office, possibly two grocery stores, church.

EVANS: What about the Church of the Brethren? That was there when you were growing up.

SPEER: Yes, that was there. Most of the people that came to that church I don't think lived in the Oakton area. There were some, but that drew people from quite a large area, because it was the only one in (probably) Fairfax County.

EVANS: I wondered. I'm glad you mentioned that. I would appreciate if you would elucidate. When they were building that on the site of the old stockade, that was mentioned: "The Baptist Brethren are building their church," and "The Baptist Brethren are having their meeting." They were referred to also as Dunkers or Dunkards.

SPEER: Dunkards. I don't remember the church being built.

EVANS: Oh, no. That was before you would remember, 1903. But you say, they came from around the County then?

SPEER: Yes, I would say a large part of their congregation was not local people.

EVANS: Do you remember any specific families who did belong to that church locally.

SPEER: I should, but offhand I can't think of the name of any particular one.

EVANS: Then the people who were buried in the cemetery. Did they come from all over also, or were they primarily from the Oakton area?

SPEER: I would say they were pretty much local people. Some of my relatives..... my grandfather's buried there and my grandmother. I would say primarily they're local. I don't know what's happened in the last twenty or thirty years. There may have been people who have bought lots there in recent years.

EVANS: Do you remember the interurban running? The electric railway.

SPEER: Very much. Where I lived was right next to it, the Sanger Station which was on Blake Lane. At that time they called it Sanger Road. So if you hear the name Sanger Road or Blake Lane, they're the same street. Sanger Road was the name in the early days, and there was a station there right at the corner of our property. My first job was in D.C., and I commuted on the old Arlington-Fairfax Railroad. It took approximately an hour. I recall near the end of its use, the last trip I took on the Arlington-Fairfax

SPEER: to Washington, it jumped the track twice before we arrived.

EVANS: Wasn't that frightening?

SPEER: This was kind of a routine thing. Fortunately nobody ever got hurt, but the tracks were in such bad shape that it jumped once between Oakton and Vienna. They came out and put it back on again. Then before we arrived in Clarendon, it jumped the track again. A short time thereafter it was done away with.

EVANS: Why do you think the tracks were allowed to be in bad repair like that?

SPEER: I would say there just wasn't enough usage, enough revenue, to maintain the proper condition. It originated in Fairfax and went into Twelfth and G Streets in Washington, turned around and came back. We'll say it took approximately an hour each way.

EVANS: When it jumped the tracks, was it on an embankment like a railroad, like a regular railroad? Wasn't there danger of rolling down?

SPEER: Oh, yes, this could have happened. Fortunately the two times that I was on it, it was on level ground, and it just ran off the track, bumped a little bit and stopped. That was the end of it, but it was a little scary.

EVANS: Well, then who came out and put it back on? Did they have a special vehicle that had to come out?

SPEER: Yes, they had a wrecking engine that had to come out and lift it back on. they would jack it up, repair the damage and send it on its way.

EVANS: Did this happen often? Was it common - did you hear other people....?

SPEER: Well it was common near the end, before they discontinued service. In the early days, no, it was good transportation. Many people used it from Fairfax to Washington and back every day.

EVANS: It was all enclosed?

SPEER: Oh, yes, they were old fashioned streetcars. Had a motorman up front. I think way back in the early days there were two people, a motorman and a

SPEER: conductor, one to take the tickets and the other one to drive. But towards the end they only had one, one motorman.

EVANS: Mayo felt that it was because of people driving cars and better roads that they ceased to use that as much. Would you agree with that?

SPEER: I'm sure they had some effect. However to drive to Washington, it was approximately an hour's drive down 123. I think they even had carpools in those days. I can recall several people riding together to work in the morning. There were no buses at that time. I'm sure that the roads had something to do with it. More people driving into the city and back. There weren't too many people around that area working in those days.

EVANS: You mean in the city?

SPEER: Small farms. People stayed at home and did their thing. There were a few office-type people who commuted back and forth to Washington. Of course, Fairfax being the county seat, I think there was some traffic generated by people going to the court house from within the county where they had access to it. That was the end of the line, so that people who lived out beyond those limits used that as a means to go to the city.

EVANS: Mr. Lawrence Leigh was a lawyer, wasn't he?

SPEER: Yes, he was a lawyer. He owned my father's house for a period of time..

EVANS: Later on? He would have commuted into Fairfax City?

SPEER: I would presume he drove. I doubt if he used the streetcar.. That's only a couple of miles. You see, this was in the 'forties. Everybody had automobiles.

EVANS: What about Hunter's Mill? Was there still a kind of village at Hunter's Mill?

SPEER: The only thing I recall at Hunter's Mill was that that's where Difficult Run crossed that road. There were just a few houses in that general area.

EVANS: Actually to go to the old Hunter's Mill, you had to go off Hunter's Mill Road. There was a kind of entrance road to what had been a station of the

EVANS: Baltimore and Ohio (correction-should read Washington and Ohio).

SPEER: The railroad went through there?

EVANS: Yes. From Vienna.

SPEER: The Old Dominion. I don't recall any Baltimore and Ohio. Ever. Old Dominion was another railroad that went up as far as Blue Mont. That also went through Vienna. That might have passed through the Hunter's Mill area.

EVANS: But there was no station at Hunter's Mill when you were there?

SPEER: I don't think so. I don't recall going back to Hunter's Mill too often.. That was on the same road where we went to the swimming pool. You had to turn off at Hunter's Mill to go to the swimming pool. I'm not that familiar with Hunter's Mill. There wasn't much there, I know that, though there might have been several houses in the general area.

EVANS: Was there the remains of a mill there at all?

SPEER: No, the mill that I remember is Colvin Run Mill, which is on up the other way on 7. That mill still stands, but Hunter's Mill, no. I don't recall.

EVANS: What about Waples Mill?

SPEER: I don't recollect ever seeing a mill there. I know the Waple farm. I know the Waple family, and I know the Waples Mill Road which was apparently named after that, but I don't recall ever seeing a mill.

EVANS: Were there any other mills on Difficult Run that you're aware of or the ruins of them? There were at one time a number of mills along there that I keep coming across.

SPEER: No, there might have been before my time. I thought I knew that area pretty well. I grew up there, but I don't remember seeing any of these mills in operation except the one at Colvin Run.

EVANS: Well, that's very helpful, because it tells me that they were gone.

SPEER: The Waples family is still living in the area. You could inquire from them where they had it, when it was abandoned.

MRS. S: Do you think that Kitty Craig would know about some of these things?
(recorder off during discussion of other possible sources-suggested contacts were Evelyn Thompson - 532-3871; a daughter of one of the Speer girls, Hattie Canfield Wiley and her brother John Wiley, who lives on the Speer place).

EVANS: When would you say that Oakton started to change, to build up more as it is today?

SPEER: I don't think there was too much there until in the early 'fifties, after the war and the area began to develop and just kept moving out farther and farther and reached Oakton. The major development there I would say has been within the past twenty years. It may have started sooner than that with shopping centers. Vienna started growing about the same time, and they just sort of merged together.

EVANS: Did you know the family that lived at the house called "Twin Oaks"?

SPEER: "Twin Oaks"? Was that the Babcocks?

EVANS: Was there a family named Lohnes? It was across from the cemetery, sort of.

MRS. S: Flint Hill?

EVANS: Yes.

SPEER: Twin Oaks. The name is familiar. There's a new development in there now, but (to Mrs. S.) she's interested in the family that lived there.

EVANS: Well, I wondered if you knew them. Did people come out for the summer at all, just to spend the summer in the country when you were growing up.

SPEER: I don't think there was any of that activity. There was no place really for them to stay other than in a private home. My last experience there, of course, was in the depression years. People were just struggling to survive. There were not too many people on vacations or going out in the country just for summer vacation.

EVANS: I know at the turn of the century people went out in the country. They went to visit, too, not merely to board as they did at Floris and at Mr. Nalls'

EVANS: at Oakton, but they went to visit their relatives in the country. What about your grandfather? Did any of his children go to the city and then come back to visit him? They did that in Wakefield.

SPEER: No, I don't think that was true in my family. My dad lived in the city for a short time during World War I.. My sister was born....I guess I was born...

MRS. S: You both were born in the house at Oakton.

EVANS: What do you remember about Mr. Rice? You were mentioning that you knew him.

SPEER: He was a respected businessman in the community. He was a broker in cattle. Everyone knew Mr. C.T. Rice, because he was involved in buying and selling cattle for people in the County. I recall him going to Canada, I believe, Puerto Rico, buying cattle and bringing them back into the area. He was a dairy farmer, but he did this also. Apparently there are such people that just make a business of buying and selling cattle. They were a well respected family in the community.

EVANS: Was he an unusual person in the community in traveling like that?

SPEER: I would say so, because he was more an executive type person than just a farmer. He was always well dressed. I know that everybody respected Mr. C. T. Rice, not anymore than anybody else, but just the type of person he was. Made a lot of money I guess.

EVANS: What other people besides your grandfather, your father and Mr. Rice would you say were the leading farmers when you were growing up?

SPEER: George Speer, a brother of my dad's, had a farm there. This was general type farming, not dairy farming. He raised corn and hay, that type of crop.

EVANS: Were most of the farmers in Oakton general farmers or dairy? You said your grandfather was noted for his cider.

SPEER: I would say the majority of them were general type farming. Rice was the one dairy farm in the area. I don't recall any others in the immediate Oakton vicinity. Others just had small farms, not truck farming, raised corn, hay....

MRS. S: Who had the apples?

SPEER: My grandfather had the apple orchard from which came the cider.

EVANS: I have heard that over in the Wakefield area where I live in the 'thirties and 'forties, when it became harder to make a living entirely by general farming, unless you had a very large farm, people in the Wakefield area began to get jobs on the side and do less farming just for their total living. Was that true in Oakton?

SPEER: I would have to believe that was true in the late 'thirties. You know, in the depression years farmers were hit pretty hard. They produced things and had no markets, no income. They had to diversify in order to survive. I'm sure in many cases this was what happened in the later 'thirties, however, I was not living there at that time. So any particular family and what they did, I'm not certain.. Of course, when my grandfather died, the family discontinued farming themselves. They rented it out for a time, and then they sold the property. Not too many years later it started to be developed into housing.

EVANS: Of the thirteen children, then, none wished to become a farmer?

SPEER: Well, there were only three sons - Uncle George, who did farm; my dad, and another brother who never was involved in farming. This might be of significance - of those thirteen children and their families, I'm the only one who has the Speer name. Of all the grandchildren. My dad was the only one who had a son. I have had one son, two sons, but only one who is married. The married one has a son, so the name is still being carried on, but I was the only one in that entire family who carried the name of Speer.

EVANS: Mrs. Speer, it sounds as though you know the area pretty well. Are you from around here?

MRS. S: Yes, we lived at Tyson's Corner. I was born in Washington and moved out to Clarendon when I was three months old. Then we moved up to Tyson's when I was eleven

EVANS: What was your maiden name?

MRS. S: Hollins.

SPEER: Her family subsisted on her home place, too. Dr. Murray's place?

MRS. S: Yes, that's what Mayo called about. He was aksing for a picture of the house and things like that.

SPEER: He was looking into that also.

EVANS: Is that near the place called "Maplewood"?

MRS. S: No, it's called Hollinswood. Near Tyson's Corner, where the Roy Rogers is at Tyson's Corner was my home place.

SPEER: Right next to the shopping center. Well, it's part of it, really. He had one hundred and forty-some acres in there.

MRS. S: Made subdivisions.

SPEER: Her mother is living with us now. I don't know what else I have to tell. A lot of the things I knew when I was a kid, I guess I've forgotten about, and maybe it's just as well. I have not kept up with the individual families to know the whereabouts of all of their children.

EVANS: Well, I'm more interested in just the things that you yourself remember, such as what you did in gradeschool, what you did in highschool.

MRS. S: What about the fire escape? I think that's interesting.

SPEER: Well, back in those days when they had to put fire escapes they put tubes.. You've seen these big round tubular things from the second floor?

EVANS: No.

SPEER: In case of a fire you just ran to that tube and jumped in it and went scooting down and came out the other end. I believe Oakton Highschool was the only one that had one of those. We had fire drills from time to time. Fortunately we never had a fire. I think that was not the only school that had one of these things. They just put this round tube about three feet in diameter with a hole in the top. You jumped in it and came out the other end, and somebody was down there to catch you.

MRS. S: Because it had two floors.

SPEER: That was the only way of getting out of the building.

EVANS: They never worried about too many trying to cram into it at one time and getting stuck or anything?

SPEER: It was large enough so that this never happened. We were drilled how to do it, one at a time, but during a fire, I don't know what would have happened if everyone had gotten there at one time. Fortunately that never happened.

MRS. S: That was really just for people on the second floor. The first floor people could get out the front.

SPEER: What she was thinking was that if they all tried to get in that hole at one time, they might wedge themselves in and nobody'd get out.

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OAKTON HISTORY RESEARCH

Oral History

I, Bernard A. Speer, do hereby agree to the use of the material tape recorded by D. Anne A. Evans this date for a history of Oakton, Virginia as projected by the Greater Oakton Citizens Association. I agree that Mrs. Evans may include the information in the history of Oakton as may be pertinent, and, that the tape recording may be included in the Fairfax Library Virginia Collection of Oral History if desired at some future date for the benefit of other research projects.

18 June 1980

Date of Agreement

Bernard A. Speer

Signature

Interviewer: D'Anne A. Evans.

Subject of Tape Recordings: Speer family residence in Oakton

Experience of Bernard Speer as Oakton resident

Speer family Bible data